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THE PHONETIC VALUE OF *JAT'*
IN OLD RUSSIAN

I

This brief study¹ of a very small subject must be prefaced by a qualification and a delimitation. The first bears on the frequently forgotten difference between conjecture and fact: in dealing with problems of historical phonetics we are obviously never sure that our conjectures, however plausible they may seem, represent the actual state of things, and we should therefore not allow those conjectures to become synonymous in our thinking with facts, which after all are the result of observation and capable of empirical proof. The second attempts to fix our conjectures in place and time. The purpose of this is to limit their application and simultaneously to increase their probability. Here 'Old Russian' then is taken to mean the literary language used all over the East Slavonic territory from the middle of the 11th to the end of the 12th century (1056—1199).

Old Russian, thus defined, was cultivated as a literary language in two more or less divergent forms. The more literary of the two was not widely different from Old Church Slavonic (Old Bulgarian), which had come to Russia with its mainly translated literature in the 10th century; the other used the Old Church Slavonic alphabet to represent the language of affairs as illustrated by treaties, deeds, and other legal documents. It has been stated, notably by S. P. Obnorskij,² that this language of affairs was a purely Russian product uninfluenced by Old Church Slavonic example, but such a view cannot be sustained, because it does less than justice to existing facts. The difference between the literary and non-literary styles is no more than a difference of degree, dependent on the varying proportion of Old Church Slavonic elements, and not of kind, implying an opposition between two distinct literary forms of Slavonic. Such an opposition would have been possible if the literary application of Slavonic had originally had more than one focus. But as

¹ Dedicated as a token of esteem to Professor Fran Ramovš.

² *Očerki po istorii rusškogo literaturnogo jazyka staršego perioda* (Moscow-Leningrad, 1946).

a matter of historical fact the Slavonic literary language, as a stylised form of an Old Bulgarian dialect, had been worked out, in both vocabulary and syntax, long before it became a stimulus and a model to Russian and the other Slavonic languages.

II

The acceptance of the Old Bulgarian (Old Church Slavonic) church books in Russia meant the acceptance of their language and the alphabets devised to represent it. These alphabets — Glagolitic and Cyrillic — were made to fit the broadly analysed phonetic, or phonological system of Macedonian Bulgarian, and the basis of both was the adaptation of the Greek symbols with their Byzantine (in effect largely modern)³ phonetic values to figure the contemporary pronunciation of an adjacent type of Slavonic. We need not discuss here the relations and the relative antiquity of the two alphabets.⁴ Suffice it to say that they agree in having a separate symbol for *jat'* (ѣ). The Glagolitic symbol in its triangular Bulgarian aspect (▲), which does not differ much from its later Croatian variant, resembles one form of the minor *jus* (♫) as it appears, for instance, in the Book of Savva (*Savvina kniga*). The Cyrillic representation of *jat'* (ѣ) shows it to be a letter of the non-Greek series and to resemble the *jery*, viz. ѣ and ѥ in design. In both alphabets *jat'* as a letter is distinct from the other vowel-symbols, but this in itself is not enough to prove that it represented a distinct vowel sound, because we have, following Greek precedent, two distinct letters for the sounds [i] and [o], viz. Cyrillic и/і and о/ω respectively. Proof of its independence as a sound however is forthcoming: *jat'* (ѣ) in the oldest Old Church Slavonic monuments is kept separate, say, from *e* by appearing in words which show it to correspond to I. E. *ē*, *ai* (*āi*), and *oi* (*ōi*) (cf. O. C. S. *ѣкѣа*, *ѣкѣѣ*, *ѣкѣа* with Lat. *sēmen*, Gk *λαίος*, Lat. *poena*), whereas *e* reproduces I. E. *e* (cf. O. C. S. *ѣрѣ* with Gk *φῆρω*).

If we attempt to draw up a scheme of the Old Church Slavonic (here mainly Old Bulgarian) vowel-system we shall find that it assumes the triangular shape pivoting on a single type of *a* which characterises so many phonetic systems.⁵ In this scheme all the Old Bulgarian vowels, oral and nasal, except *jat'*, take their

³ See G. N. Hatzidakis, *Einleitung in die neugriechische Grammatik* (Leipzig, 1892); H. Pernot, *D'Homère à nos jours. Histoire, écriture, prononciation du grec* (Paris, 1921); A. C. Juret, *Phonétique grecque* (Paris, 1938); R. M. Dawkins, 'The Greek Language in the Byzantine Period' (N. H. Baynes and H. St. L. B. Moss, *Byzantium*, Oxford, 1948, pp. 252–267).

⁴ See my article 'Sources of Old Church Slavonic' (*The Slavonic and East European Review*, XXVIII, 71, London, 1950).

⁵ See my article 'The Old Bulgarian Language-Type' (*Archivum Linguisticum*, I, 2, Glasgow, 1949).

But probably this *ě* was not a uniform sound any more than was, say, the sound represented by the discarded Bulgarian symbol ѣ, which is now replaced, according to phonetic context, by я and е (*e*). We can imagine that the *ѣ* of O. C. S. *ѣкати* may have been a closer sound than the *ѣ* of *ѣкаѣ*, exactly as it is in Bulgarian to-day.

III

The Cyrillic alphabet with its 10th century Bulgarian values was adapted to Russian use, and although Old Russian resembled Old Bulgarian more than the modern languages resemble each other, there can be no doubt, *a priori* as well as *a posteriori*, that there were discrepancies between sound and spelling from the outset. This is most strikingly illustrated by the occasional confusion of the symbols of nasal and oral vowels in the Ostromir Gospels (e. g. *ѣ/ѣ* and *ѣ/ѣ*, *ѣ/ѣ* and *ѣ/ѣ*: *ѣѣѣѣ* for *ѣѣѣѣ*, *ѣѣѣ* for *ѣѣѣ*). This earliest dated Old Church Slavonic monument — it was copied in North Russia in 1055—57 — also illustrates an early Russian pronunciation of the symbol *ѣ* as *e* (e. g. *ѣѣѣ* for *ѣѣѣ*). The substitution of *ѣ* for *ѣ* and the reverse occurs in monuments of North Russian (e. g. Novgorodian) origin. But even South Russian (Kievite) monuments have *ѣ* for *ѣ* in the period under consideration.⁷ The existence of these substitutions points to the prevalence of a general Russian pronunciation of the symbol *ѣ*, which differed appreciably from the conjectured Bulgarian pronunciation.

What was this Old Russian pronunciation of *ѣ*, and was it as uniform over the Old Russian area as the pronunciation of historic *jat'* is in the modern period? To answer these questions we must review a variety of facts provided by historical records and the present-day phonetic study of Russian and its dialects and of its Slavonic cognates.

IV

The symbols *ѣ* and *ѣ*, we have seen, are interchangeable in a number of instances in the Ostromir Gospels. Other 11th century monuments contain *inter alia* the following examples: *ѣѣ* for *ѣѣ* (Svjatoslav Miscellany, 1073), *ѣѣѣѣ* for *ѣѣѣѣ* (Turov Gospels), *ѣѣѣ* for *ѣѣѣ* (Archangel Gospels, 1092). In the next century the number of such interchanges becomes larger and the examples more obvious (e. g. *ѣѣ* for *ѣѣ*, Galic Gospels, 1144; (*ѣѣѣѣ* for *ѣѣѣѣ*, Inscription on the Cross of Jevrosinija of Polock, 1161; *ѣѣѣѣѣѣ* for *ѣѣѣѣѣѣ*, Dobrilo Gospels, 1164; *ѣѣѣѣ* for *ѣѣѣѣ*, Thirteen Homilies of Gregory of Nazianzus). This phenomenon inclines us to infer that perhaps as early as the 11th century the Eastern Slavs, both northern

⁷ V. Vondrák, *Církevněslovanská chrestomatie* (Brno, 1925), p. 172.

and southern, pronounced ʔ and ɛ identically, and the sound, except between palatalised consonants, was e , as in modern Russian. But there are other interchanges of vowel-letters involving *jat'*, viz. $\text{u}/\text{ʔ}$, $\text{a}/\text{ʔ}$, and u/k . The first two are characteristically Russian, the last is assumed to have existed in Common Slavonic, and occurs in the oldest records of Old Church Slavonic wherever the preceding sound is a palatal or palatalised consonant (e. g. *стоѣти, сѣшати, дрожатѣ, молатѣ*). Russian examples of it occur in the Ostromir Gospels (e. g. *бѣахѣ, идѣашѣ, ѣдѣахѣ*). Examples of the interchange of u/k may be seen in *ѡ* for *ѡк* (Svjatoslav Miscellany, 1076), *вѣдѣтъ* for *ѣдѣтъ* (Turov Gospels) and of a/k in *капѣк* for *капѣ* (Ostromir Gospels), *ѣдѣоуѣк* for *ѣдѣоуѣ* (Svjatoslav Miscellany, 1076). The last interchange indeed is regarded as a correspondence: O. C. S. *ѣ* is paralleled by O. R. ʔ , as in the acc. plur. of the masculine *ja*-type nouns (cf. O. C. S. *коуѣ* with O. R. *коѣк*) or the gen. sing. of feminine *ja*-types (cf. O. C. S. *земѣ* with O. R. *земѣк*). The parallelism emerges best by comparing the *ѣ*-forms of Old Church Slavonic monuments with the corresponding ʔ -forms of Old Russian legal documents (cf. O. C. S. acc. plur. *моуѣ* with O. R. *моѣк*, Mstislav Volodimirovič's Deed of Gift, 1130). It occurs exclusively in the nominal paradigms and is absent in the verb, where we find the correlation O. C. S. *ѣ*/O. R. *ѣ* (e. g. *дѣдѣтъ/дѣдѣтъ, моуѣѣ/моуѣѣ, читѣѣ/читѣѣ*). The adjectives, as a nominal category, run parallel to the nouns in this respect, except that a soft long type like the O. C. S. fem. gen. sing. *сѣшѣѣ* has the O. R. parallel *сѣшѣк* as well as the more >regular< *сѣшѣѣк*. Here again we come up against the phonetic parallelism of $\text{ʔ}/\text{ɛ}$ in Old Russian.

The collation of >pure< Old Church Slavonic on the one hand and Old Church Slavonic in Russian recension on the other yields, as we have noted, the following sporadic ratios, viz. the symbol ʔ occurs as a substitute for *u*, *ɛ*, *a*, and *u*, and may be replaced by any of these symbols. The inference from this may be that the pronunciation of ʔ varied between the phonetic >maxima< of [i] and [a] in Old Russian. We may assume *a priori*, after studying the present-day Russian sound-system, that the phonetic value of ʔ was anything but uniform and tended to vary with dialect and stressing. Some modern Russian dialects of the Northern type still distinguish a closer ɛ from a more open e , and the first generally corresponds to historic ʔ (ɛ), whereas the literary language identifies ʔ (ɛ) and ɛ (e) phonetically. Stress tends to preserve the >unreduced< pronunciation, as in modern Russian, and its absence favours >reduction<, or what, in phonetic terms, is a change of sound. It appears likely that an unstressed ʔ , as in *сѣшѣѣк*, would prefer a >raised< vowel, viz. e , while the corresponding stressed symbol, as in *земѣк*, would incline to be lowered, perhaps, to [æ]. This seems to be supported by the evidence of Polish parallels such as *siano*: *сѣно* and *wodzie*: *воѣк*. Here the second Polish form, incidentally, shows a shift of stress.

But the evidence of purely Slavonic parallels is not enough. Old Russian was in contact in the early Middle Ages not merely with Old Church Slavonic, but with West Finnic (West Soman), Baltic, Scandinavian, Byzantine Greek, and Arabic, besides a great many other languages of both related and totally alien stocks. Let us consider a number of phonetic correspondences between these languages. West Finnic⁹ offers such examples as Est. *nādal* (cf. O. R. *нѣдѣла*), *lääva*, *määra* (cf. O. R. *члѣвѣ*, *мѣра*), Car. *reühkä* (O. R. *рѣхъ*). The last three examples are paralleled by Latv. *klēvs*, *mērs*, and *grēks*, where *ē* is phonetically [æ]. Later Carelian loans from Russian show *ie* for **k* (cf. *miela* with O. R. *мѣла*), which may reflect a changed pronunciation of **k* in Russian. This *ie* indeed is generally accepted by Russian scholars as the phonetic equivalent of **k* in the medieval language.¹⁰ Some Russian loans from West Finnic seem to support this (e. g. *пѣрък* < Finn. *purje*), whereas others, for instance the tribal names Häme and Karjala, figure in Old Russian as *Ѣмѣ*, *Мѣмѣ* and *Корѣла* respectively, which suggests an open value for **k*.¹¹ Old Russian loans from Scandinavian sources prepare us for a closer pronunciation of **k* (cf. the personal names *Олкѣ*: Óleifr, *Рорѣлкѣ*: Ragn(h)eid, *Сѣркѣ*: Sveinn, *Сѣркѣлдѣ*: Sveinaldr).¹² Byzantine Greek in the 10th century records of Constantine Porphyrogenitus¹³ offers no transcriptions of Russian names with **k*, except possibly τῶν Σεοβλων, which is thought to stand for *Сѣверомѣ*, but here there has been obvious contamination with *Σεοβλα* and *Σεοβλοι*. On the other hand the much older river-name *Δάναπρις* has the O. R. equivalent *Дѣнѣпрѣ*, where **k* seems to be very open. Here Arabic comes to our aid with *Dulabe* and its variants *Dulaba*, *Dulaja*, *Dulana*, *Dulavana*, for O. R. *Дулѣвѣ*,¹⁴ if this is the right correlation. But then in Arabic we also have the form *Kujabe* for *Кѣвѣ* (cf. Constantine's *Κιοδβα*).

The testimony of non-Slavonic languages which were in contact with Old Russian leads therefore to the same conclusion as that drawn from ancient and

⁹ J. J. Mikkola, *Die ältesten Berührungen zwischen Ostseejinnisch und Russisch* (Helsinki, 1938).

¹⁰ Cf. A. A. Šachmatov, 'Očerki drevnejšego perioda istorii russkogo jazyka' (*Enc. Slav. Fil.*, 11/1, Petrograd, 1915); A. D. Grigor'jev, *Russkij jazyk* (Warsaw, 1915); N. N. Durnovo, *Očerk istorii russkogo jazyka* (Moscow-Leningrad, 1924); L. A. Bulachovskij, *Istoričeskij kommentarij k literaturnomu russkomu jazyku* (Khar'kov-Kiev, 1937).

¹¹ A. A. Šachmatov, *Povesť vremennyh let*, I (Petrograd, 1916).

¹² V. Thomson, *The Relations between Ancient Russia and Scandinavia and the Origin of the Russian State* (Oxford-London, 1877).

¹³ J. P. Migne, *Patrologiae cursus completus. Patrologiae graecae tom. CXIII*, Paris, 1864).

¹⁴ A. Ja. Harkavi, *Skazanija musul'manskich pisatelej o slavjanach i russkich* (St. Petersburg, 1870).

modern Slavonic parallels, viz. that O. R. * appears to have been a phonological complex, or variable sound poised normally between the phonetic »points« [e] and [æ], with a tendency to be raised above [e] or lowered below [æ] according to the phonetic context as determined by the distribution of sound and stress, and according to the vagaries of dialectal practice.

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Povzetek

Pri historični fonetiki je treba dobro ločiti konjektуре od resničnih podatkov; vse konjektуре pa je treba postavljati v določen čas in prostor. Avtorju gre za določitev glasovne vrednosti *ě* v stari ruščini, t. j. v knjižnem jeziku, kakor je bil v rabi na vsem slovanskem vzhodu 1056—1199. V skrbni obliki ta jezik ni bil daleč od stare cerkvene slovanščine, v poslovni pa se je bolj odmikal, vendar je to isti jezik v dveh stopnjah.

S staro cerkveno slovanščino so Rusi prevzeli pisavo, ki fonološko predstavlja makedonsko bolgarščino, a je oprta na grške črke takratne izgovarjave. V glagolici in cirilici imamo posebno znamenje za jat, a to še ni dokaz za samosvoj glas, ker imamo več črkovnih dublet brez glasovne razlike v grški in stcslov. pisavi. Glasovno vrednost za *ě* proti etimološkemu *e* navadno opredeljujemo s tem, da zastopa *ě* čisto druge indoevropske glasove (*ē, ai-āi, oi-ōi*) kakor *e*. Toda v vokalnem sistemu stare cerkvene slovanščine imamo en sam tip *a* in v tem sistemu ni prostora za *ě* (gl. trikotno razvrstitev). Pripisovali so mu dolžino in dvoglasnost (n. pr. Leskien *ea*, Mikkola *eä*) zlasti zaradi zamenjave *ě* in *ja* posebno na začetku besed. Moral je biti sprednji vokal, a tu niha med ozkim in širokim glasom *i-a* (ukr. *lis* — polj. *las* za stcsl. *lěsz*); v vrsti sprednjih vokalov ga je treba postaviti med *e/ę* in *a*. Verjetno pa *ě* ni imel zmeraj enake glasovne vrednosti.

Zamenjave v prepisovanju Ostromirovega evangelija nam pričajo, da se je glasovno stara ruščina že zgodaj odmaknila od stare cerkvene slovanščine; poleg zamenjave nosnikov *ę* in *q* z ustnima *e* in *o* imamo že tudi zamenjavo *e* in *ě*. V 11. stoletju so zahodni Slovani na severu in na jugu enako izgovarjali *e* in *ě*. Srečujemo pa tudi zamenjave *ě* z *i, ę* in *ja*; zadnja zamenjava je utemeljena v stari cerkveni slovanščini za palatali, tu jo srečujemo tudi v drugačnih pozicijah. Zamenjava *ę* in *ě* je pogostna pri osnovah na *ja* in *jo*; imamo pa hkrati tudi zamenjavo *ę* in *ja*. Po vsem tem bi morali sklepati, da je glasovna vrednost *ě* nihala nekje med *i* in *a*. Verjetno je bila različna po narečjih in naglasu. Današnja ruska severna narečja ločijo zaprti *ę* od bolj odprtega *e* in prvi predstavlja historični *ě*, medtem ko sta v knjižnem jeziku sovpadla *e* in *ě*. Poudarek varuje *e* pred redukcijo, v nepoudarjeni poziciji pa se nagiblje k redukciji; zdi se, da je bil nepoudarjeni *ě* v primerih kakor *sinoě* »visok« samoglasnik, medtem ko je »bil poudarjeni v primerih kakor *zeml'ě* nižji, usmerjen proti *æ*, kakor bi kazala poljščina s *siano* za *sěno* in *wodzie* za *vodě*.

Isto nam potrjujejo tudi neslovanski jeziki v substituiranju starega ruskega *ě* (finsčina, baltščina, skandinavščina, bizantinska grščina in arabščina). Avtorjeva izvajanja potrjujejo sklepe, do katerih je prišel Fr. Ramovš v članku Fonetična vrednost psl. *ě*. Razprave AZU II, 111—124. Ljubljana 1944.